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THE

LOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

OF

THE ACQUITTAL OF JESUS;

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HIS DIVINITY DEDUCED FROM

HIS CHARACTER AND CLAIMS.

A Sermon preached before the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces, at New Glasgow, June, 1867.

BY REV. JAMES BENNET, A. M., MODERATOR.

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The Logical Consequences OF THE ACQUITTAL OF JESUS.

LUKE XXIII, 14.—“Behold, I, having examined *him* before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him.”

PILATE, looking on the accused with the eye of a Roman judge, and seeing his innocence of the charges which affected the outward weal of society, and the authority of his sovereign, as well as the unacknowledged yet apparent envy of his accusers ; discerning under all the colourings of malice the hues of innocence, urges again and again “I find no fault in him,” and yet with weak and wicked inconsistency, pronounces Jesus guilty and delivers him to be crucified.

Pilate is not alone in his inconsistency. There are many even in the present day who after examination of the charges which have been brought against Christ, have pronounced his character faultless, and yet with strange conclusion they condemn his claims. They would not crucify him, but they would consign him to a place in which he will hurt the world no longer with his superstitions. Covering him with the mockeries of royalty they even pretend to bow to his sceptre, and, while acknowledging his superiority, they reduce him to a rank to which he refuses to descend, coupling his name with that of Confucius, Zoroaster, Socrates or Mahomet. Such judgment Christ deems only another sentence to crucifixion, and he will hold those who pronounce it guilty of his shame.

Only one of two courses is open to his

judges, either to condemn him altogether, or to acquit him fully. It cannot be concealed that the charges brought against him by the Jews were founded on claims which he made. He *did* intend to take the place of Moses ; to break the shell of Judaism that the beautiful truth which it contained might come forth in plumage and in song ; to raise the temple of his body from its ruin in the grave ; to establish a kingdom in which all kings should be subjects ; to make himself worshipped, as the Father who was one with him ; to sit chief in the affections of man, as the very God of his life. All this he claimed, all this he has done. These claims were just if there be no fault in him. If unjust, he is one of the highest criminals or the greatest madmen the world ever saw. There was no legitimate course for the Jews to pursue but either to concede his claims or to condemn his conduct. In what form should that condemnation have been made ? The Jewish law demanded death for such crimes. According to the charity of christianity, punishment for them is remitted to a higher tribunal. But conscience must ever condemn such false claims while refusing to assume the weapons of justice to destroy him who makes them. The Jew however, had to acquit him altogether or besides condemning his assumptions, he must condemn him to death. Pilate might have acquitted him

in the light of Roman Law, but if he really found no fault in him on account of these claims, he is doubly guilty in decreeing his death. No doubt his declaration regarding Christ's innocence has relation solely to the requirements of Roman Law. He goes no deeper. We must. It is not competent for us to say he committed no act which English law would make criminal. We have a higher law. It is the law of God written on the heart. By our law if he were not the son of God and yet made himself such he ought to die—that is morally—he must be consigned to the Calvary in which outraged opinion crucifies all such characters. We can have no king who is either a wild enthusiast or a deceiver. Is it not blasphemy to say that God's best gift to man was tainted with madness, or corrupted with hypocrisy?

The controversy about Christ is not essentially changed. The same great question remains to be debated, Was he that which he claimed to be? It is important that we should see this, and that we should not be blindfolded by the assumptions made by the opponents of Christianity, as though it were not a question of honesty or imposture. It is on this arena not that of the natural sciences that the main battle of the evidences is to be fought and won.

But here we are met in *limine* by the enquiry about the witnesses. As on the trial before Pilate they were false, so we are told they are not now to be depended upon. They deal in hearsays. We have not the testimony of the eye-witnesses. The gospels, it is said, can no doubt be traced up to near the age in which Jesus lived; but there is a number of years after his death in which the gospel was traditional. This region is inaccessible to the explorer. We cannot tell whether the stream of the gospel history here partakes more of the showers of heaven or the springs of earth; whether it flows from sources of fact or wells of wonder. Which of the Evangelists wrote first? What is the relation of their writings to each other? Have we indeed the records of those who saw and heard Him, or only of those who dealt in second-hand rehearsals? Are our Gospels by the authors

whose names they bear, or only according to the report of their reputed authors? Whence the curious coincidences and strange differences of the Synoptics;—whence, especially, the contrast between them and John? Instead of the testimony of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it is asserted that we have that of certain persons after their death, using their names and influence to give substance and fixity to the gigantic shadow of Jesus which the imagination of a nation of wonder-lovers had raised and cast athwart the age. The biography of Jesus is thus a fanciful narrative, having a remote analogy to his real life. It is evident it will be only after a great deal of cross-questioning we will get at the real facts of the case. But in this we are greatly assisted by the critical school, Wolfenbuttel, Strauss, and others, who have set themselves to sift the false from the true, the fiction from the substratum of fact. If they had been as successful as pretentious, we should have had to thank them. Their labours, however, have been a failure. It could not be otherwise. The purely scientific faculty will ever fail to comprehend what is above the order of nature. But let us hear them. The problem they would solve is how much and what fact underlies this fiction. As they have decided that the miracle is impossible, every thing miraculous is rejected. The incarnation, the mighty works, the fulfilled prophecies, the resurrection, the ascension, are all to be attributed to the popular imagination; the residuum is a man of striking originality, biologizing influence, and elevated character; carrying captive the imagination by his fresh and charming discourses, curing diseases which specially depend on mental states, and by his vast popularity aiming at universal empire. As to the mode in which he came to be accredited with so many wonders—what more plain? In his own day, as usual in such cases, his doings were exaggerated. In the next age the proportions swell. The narratives, oral at first, when reduced to writing blend fact with fiction, and round off the real with the more charming ideal. The wonderful life must spring from a

miraculous birth, and come to a miraculous close. What so natural as the production of the supernatural! Given a man of grand intellect, ecstatic temperament, good morals—in connection with an ignorant people of active imagination, and see the result,—the mythic—historic Christ! How beautiful, captivating the taste of our age, and fully explaining to the critical conception the most wonderful events the world ever witnessed!

This theory derives its plausibility from its object—which is not to find out the truth but to get rid of the miraculous. The nineteenth century, it is said, does not believe in miracles. Why reject the incarnation, the works, the resurrection? The reply is, the science of the nineteenth century will not let us admit such things as possible. Universal experience is against them. Law will not admit them. You have only to ask Baden Powell. The vote of the scientific world is that the miracle is impossible. We say no. We summon the scientific world before us. You say gentlemen that the miracle is impossible. On what grounds? "We have never seen one; all things proceed according to established laws." That is good reason for strong improbability. We hold that the miracle is very *improbable*, but we cannot conclude its *impossibility* on such grounds. Is it not possible that he who constituted the order of nature should for some purpose arrest that progress? Here our scientific world will divide into two sections, the atheist and impersonal pantheist saying, No, nature is its own author, it never varies—the theist, admitting the abstract possibility. Well then, none but atheists and pantheists of the scientific world will deny the possibility. Their reason is, that there is no God.—But those who have tried to get rid of God as far as possible, making all creation but development, admit that their hypothesis does not account for the formation of the first life germ. God is still necessary for that. But indeed if the doctrine of the conservation or correlation of forces be correct, all the force of creation as developed to this day, was contained in the formation of that first germ. The science of the

present day has corrected that metaphysical philosophy which saw in cause and effect only antecedents and consequents. Faraday, Liebig, Grove and Thompson, all tell us *there is nothing in the effect which was not in the cause.** Well, go back and back and when you have come to the first cause, the originator of the first life germ, you must admit that this is the power which formed all. To form a single life germ may appear a small affair, but to form a life germ which contains in it the cause and power to develope all life germs—behold the almighty God! You have hid him from us, O ye men of science as long as possible, with your development theories, but to make your theories complete you have at last confessed the necessity of God.

"But what then! God has formed all to go on by unchanging law. Can he interfere with the work of his hand?" Certainly, unless you can prove that his force was *exhausted* in the creative act. He would be a bold man who would affirm that. Who will so bind God to his work that he cannot operate upon it, but that he must helplessly let it run on in obedience to Is he greater than God? If so the God of

* The theory of Brown, that all we know of Cause and Effect is that the one invariably follows the other, is generally acquiesced in by the metaphysicians. Thus, J. S. Mill, in his recent examination of Sir W. Hamilton's Philosophy, says, Vol. 2, page 279, (Boston edition). "What experience makes known is the fact of an invariable sequence between every event and some special combination of antecedent conditions in such sort that wherever and whenever that union of antecedents exists, the event does not fail to occur. Any *must* in the case, any necessity other than the unconditional universality of the fact we know nothing of."

On the other hand, E. G. J. R. Mayer, in his treatise on the Forces of Inorganic Nature, published in Liebeg's Journal, says, "Forces are causes: accordingly we may, in relation to them, make full application of the principle—*Causa aequat Effectum*. If the Cause C has the Effect E, then C = E. If, in its turn, C is the Cause of a second Effect F, we have E = F, and so on: C = E = F = C." He then proceeds to shew that the Cause passes into and is to be found wholly in the Effect, or Effects which oftentimes can be resolved back into their causes. Is there no *must*, no *necessity* here; no knowledge, as Brown would affirm, of anything but sequences? and as Mill continues to say in the teeth of all the scientists?

the original impulse no matter what might be the advantage of interference? Man at least is not so helpless. He can interfere with his own works to stop them, to vary them, to guide them. He interferes even with God's works every day, breaks chains of natural causation at a thousand points. Is he greater than God? The God of science is a miserable fetish. The spirits locked up in caves by genii are less helpless. Let science at least give God some liberty—a freedom of will which, either by or without motive save what he finds in himself, is able to do what his creatures can, in regard to their works daily perform. But in doing this it concedes the possibility of the miracle.

"But though possible, the scientific mind so accustomed to absolute regularity finds, itself at last incapable of conceiving the suspension for a moment of any one natural law. Childhood believes any wonder, youth begins to doubt, manhood to deny, and as knowledge increases the possibility of the miraculous vanishes." Well we cannot deny the *tendency*. We feel that all material things go on by fixed laws, but are we scientific in making our experience the measure of all experience? We should not permit our tendencies to pronounce impossible what we have *previously* seen to be possible. Science should put the curb on its tendencies or it will plunge into absurdity. The wise tongue will become a babbler. Strange that science, the highest thought of the grandest being made by God,—the great contradiction of atheism—should affirm atheism as its faith. But we remember "the world by wisdom knows not God."

So we return to the consideration of the trustworthiness of the witnesses with this thought, that though they should affirm some things that are miraculous about Christ, we are not to assume that all this is mythical, the work of popular imagination. We refuse to take it for a canon that the miraculous is to be rejected because it is such. We are not about to affirm at present the inspiration of the record, the truth of the miracle, and, as a consequence the divine origin of Christianity. It has been said

that in the present day the miracle is the great weight which Christianity has to bear. Miracles do not support it—they are supported by it. If that were true, and in one sense it is, we have this position to make good—It is able to bear them. Only know Christ and all miracles will be possible unto you.

But we must not forget the Mythical Philosophers. They have taken away the miracles; well, let them in the meantime. What do they leave us? Christ's teachings? Yes, pretty much. Christ's character? Yes, that too; for it would be evidently more difficult to suppose such a character invented, than that one actually existed sustaining it. We have to thank Rousseau for the most eloquent expression of this truth. The witnesses, then, are trustworthy so far. Then we can have Christ up before us. If Strauss refuses to allow John to come up as an eye-witness and reporter of actual sayings—Renan, his pupil, thinks there is no good reason why he should be put out of court. After all, he only says in his own way what the others have said in their way. We have no objection to admit that he presents the doctrine of the incarnation after a Platonic fashion, but he presents it. "The word was made flesh," contains all that Luke has spread over two chapters. John, too, has a retentive memory for the antilogies which often arose in Christ's communications with the Jews. We shall not, however, assume anything which our opponents are unwilling to grant. If there be any sand beneath our foundations we are willing that it be removed, if only we at last come to the rock, and that rock is not John, or Matthew, or Peter, but Christ.

The point, then, at which we commence, is that a certain character has been drawn of Christ by the Evangelists, which is altogether original and unique—the history of the world presents' nothing like it. Moses and Elias, Isaiah and Ezekiel grow pale in the light of this bright star. It was no affectation, but simple truth, which led the Baptist to say, the latchet of his shoe I am not worthy to unloose. All the world has looked to it with the long wonder of eighteen centuries. Imposture, or superstition,

or charm, or myth, might in that period have produced some equal if they produced Him. But we seem doomed to know no second Jesus. Our admiration grows as each new heroism of his life is evolved. Even scepticism praises,—is rapturous over his character.

The character as drawn by the Evangelists is wonderfully *real*. Its completeness of supernature makes it natural. We find a perfect harmony between the grandeur of the man and the God that indwells. The claims, facts, teachings agree. We are struck with this. The followers of Jesus have hardly recognized this more than many of the sceptical school of the present day. The sarcasm of Voltaire and the coarseness of Paine have given place to compliment and courtesy. I need not quote Rousseau, as his testimony is so widely known. Parker says, “he unites in himself the sublimest precepts and divinest practice, thus more than realizing all the dreams of prophets and sages; rises free from all the prejudices of his age, nation, and sect; gives free range to the Spirit of God in his breast, sets aside law, sacred and true,—honoured as it was,—its forms, its sacrifices, its temples, its priests, puts away the doctors of the law, subtle, irrefragable, and pours out a doctrine beautiful as the light, sublime as heaven, true as God. Eighteen centuries have passed since the sun of humanity rose so high in Jesus. What man—what sect has mastered his thought, comprehended his method, and so fully applied it to life.”—Then Renan says: “Jesus had no visions. God is in him; he feels that he is with God, and he draws from his heart what he says of His Father. The highest consciousness of God that ever existed in the breast of humanity was that of Jesus.” Indeed, the whole of the “*Origins of Christianity*,” is a laboured panegyric on Jesus according to the ideal of the Frenchman, tempered by the airs and scenery of Galilee and Jerusalem. Strauss is too cold to express admiration for the noble tower of character he set himself to destroy. Newman is depreciatory. But with few exceptions the critical school pronounce him divine. Whenever

they depreciate they have first had to destroy. How? By attempting to show that the character of Jesus is in large measure the result of imagination. They do not say it was *invented*. That has been shown to be impossible. What is the process then? There was an actual Christ; but what we have is this Christ sublimed, elevated. What there was of actual nobleness in the real Jesus was made nobler, of purity, purer, by passing through the contemplative soul of John, the ardent mind of Peter, the loving heart of Mary,—the golden character was refined in the alembic of the church’s enthusiasm—the rough angularities were all polished off—the gross was filtered, and the flawed became perfect. What a grand work of moral art is this Galilean imagination capable of? A fortuitous concourse of moral ideas has aggregated round a rough pretentious character, and behold the glorious, the divine image, which men have worshipped for eighteen centuries—and yet worship! It is strange that no such result ever was seen before or since. What was there in that patristic Pharisaic age which so sublimed the minds of the followers of Jesus, *if not himself*, that could produce this unparalleled spiritual sculpture? If we should affirm that the *Venus de Medicis* was fashioned by a hundred sculptors, not one of whom had learned the art, by each one taking up the chisel and working a little on the rough block, without common design, we should not say such a foolish thing. Admit that the report of a wonderful work may grow into a miracle, we are not helped thereby to see how the character of *God in man* can be the growth of an imaginative enthusiasm, as an exquisite aroma rises from a garden of flowers. The traits of His character are too distinct, as well as proportionate, to be the result of such social efflorescence.* The account of the miracle

* “The complete catalogue of the virtues could give no adequate view of the great peculiarity in the character of Jesus; the absolute similarity in all moral faculties, the perfect inward harmony unruffled by the slightest passion or selfishness. Never a moment withdrawn from the closest communion with the father in heaven, or from unreserved devotion to the welfare of mankind.”—*Schaff’s History, page 56, Vol. 1.*

may grow, but this is no question of *size*, but of *quality*. While the story grows the popular imagination makes it grotesque. All proportion is lost, and the original harmony becomes a discord. All the mythologies prove this. On the other hand think of the beauty, the proportion of Christ's character. Ask how any portion thereof had its excellent beauty if not from Himself. Did the sermon on the Mount instead of proceeding as we have it from himself, receive a grandeur to which it had no pretensions from floating in the cloud-land of tradition for some years, till at last it was condensed as an exquisite but combinative essence of Jesus and His Church, by Matthew. Or have we not rather to fear that much of the original beauty and force have been lost? Jesus is in some respects to us but the shadow of what he was. We have but a few of his sayings and doings—a fragment. The world could not contain the book of the whole. But fragmentary as is the life as shadowed forth by the Evangelists, we see as in a picture the glory of the Lord. Ex pede Herculem. These fragments indicate the colossal grandeur of the Jesus who was—the lowest estimate of the greatest sceptic being that He was the greatest and best of the sons of men—the more adequate being that here indeed is God manifest in the flesh.

The character of Jesus as indicated in the gospels is then real. There may be great differences in its shading as presented by John and Matthew, but whatever there is of grandeur in each is from Him. The sermon on the mount is his, the parables are his, the discussions with the Jews are his, the instructions to the disciples are his, the prayers are his, the claims are his. No one would have had the hardihood to write unless he had uttered those daring words, "I proceeded forth and came from God," "I and my father are one," "Which of you convinceth me of sin," "the son of man which is in heaven." "I am the bread of life" "he that eateth me shall live by me. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood ye have no life in you." The idea that John invented such expressions would go far to

elevate him to the throne of Jesus, but for the diabolism of the deceit. To say that these great words are but the echo of the imagination of the disciples who saw in Jesus a sublimity of character, in correspondence with such claims is to leave the problem for solution which it was intended to get rid of—*the same character*; only in this way we have no means of finding out how that character was made known to the disciples. If they did not get their ideas of his character from the sublimity of his words and claims and personality, where did they get them? From the miracles? Well let us say we are agreed. But this would at once establish the divine character of the whole. Ah, scepticism will take care of that. They got the character from the imagination that the miracles were wrought. Well, let us see how this will work. We want a basis for the invention of these grand claims. If, having reduced the grandeur of his teachings and claims, you now take away the miracle as a reality, what is left as the foundation of the invention? You must have some basis for popular fancy to build upon—some material to work with. To make bricks without straw was hard, but this were like requiring them to be made without clay as well. No doubt popular fancy is capable of great feats, but they are grotesque, and hardly equal to the formation of a grand-consistent character, with only a few tricks of legerdemain to begin with. With wonderful works the popular imagination may make their author a saint—the man of hair-cloth and cells, of fasting and prayer—but never a Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, all the miracles in the world, without the one miracle, his supernatural character, could never have given us The Lord and Master.

But we are going too fast. It is, admitted he is a great and glorious character,—a good man, a great teacher, an excellent moralist; one who knows more of God than all the world besides—the breath of his voice is redolent of heaven. All this the sceptical school say. This is much; but had this been all we should have had no historic Christianity. We should have read some things of him along with the sayings

of Solon, or the philosophy of Plato or Zeno. No—Jesus does not come before us as a teacher or a philosopher, but as heaven-sent, God-counselled—as the Son of God. He proceeded forth and came from God. He and His Father are one. He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father. He is King—by truth and right King of all. Why, these claims of His are the very charges on which he was condemned. He speaks blasphemy—he wants to be a king. Well, we must take one of two positions. Either his claims, which we have seen were made, are just, or it was right to put him to death, or at least confine him to some asylum. Christ was what he claimed to be, or he was the greatest of madmen or of imposters.* The sceptical world resile from such conclusions.

It is always to be borne in mind that a large part of the character of Christ is made up of his claims. His teachings raise him above philosophy, his innocence and lamb-like nature captivate our affections; his goodness and beneficence are a new leaven introduced into the lump of humanity; but his claims, we hesitate not to say, have clothed him, to us, with the attributes of God. That which gives him most dignity in the Church's estimation, is that which the sceptic thinks extravagant and absurd. We should never have seen in him that grand presence which makes us bow, but for the consciousness of right and power evidenced by these claims. So far from

thinking him fanatical or audacious in making them, they seem to us most reasonable. To affirm the supernatural is in him most natural. On men of medium dimensions the armour of the giant is ridiculous, but how beseeming on the giant. Ulysses easily bends his own bow. Alexander affecting the nod of Jupiter is only a fit burlesque in the midst of drunken orgies. When Phaeton attempted to drive the horses of the sun, he could not sustain the character he assumed a single day. Christ sustained the claims he made for years—has sustained them for eighteen centuries. Upon what part of his character will the scepticism of the nineteenth century inflict a wound? Which of you convinceth me of sin? still rings through our ears. Shew us an immorality. Is it the dead fig-tree that is objected?—as if God by his lightnings had never blasted a vine. Is it his denunciation of the Pharisees? As though virtue became vice by the strength of its denunciations of vice. The charge may be made among those who think that the manifestation of a divine anger against the false and hypocritical is itself criminal. But we must not forget that complicity in the miracle working character, which it appears the disciples forced upon him, is charged,—and if the charge be true, (the miracles being, of course, supposed false,) then his innocence vanishes. The forbidden fruit has been eaten, and the world is lost a second time. Satan has been successful, and the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, infects his whole character. He who could join in complicity to deceive, may lay aside the claims of Messiahship and honesty at the same time. It is not so, however. The record gives us no shadow for such a charge. That the disciples believed him to work miracles; that he believed in his own power to do so, is as plain as noon-day—unless we agree with Strauss, that the whole of the accounts were manufactured from some mythic germs. Renan, who accepts the accounts generally as a record of what was supposed to have taken place, tells us that Christ pretended, contrary to his better judgment, to work the miracles forced on him. In making

* The divinity of Christ . . . appears . . . in his own express testimony respecting himself. This must be either true or fearfully presumptuous, and indeed downright blasphemy. But how can the latter supposition stand a moment before the moral purity and dignity of Jesus in his every word and work, and acknowledged by the general voice even of Unitarians and Rationalists? Self-deception in a matter so momentous, and with a mind in other respects so clear and sound, is of course equally out of the question. Thus we are shut up to the divinity of Christ, and reason itself must at last bow in silent awe before the tremendous word, "I and my father are one."—*Schaff's History, Vol. I, page 57.*

The above and preceding extracts or notes were not seen by the author till after his sermon had gone to press. Similar views are presented by Ullman and many other devout thinkers.

this charge, though he does not seem to know it, he has reduced Jesus to the level of the mountebank. No doubt, he tells us, that Christ, to withdraw himself from this false position, thought it necessary to urge on the crisis which would destroy himself, but establish his cause. Admirable resolution for one who deceived both his disciples and the multitude. By martyrdom he will establish a cause which is beginning to totter, because founded on supposed miracles which he cannot further supply. Tired of sustaining a false position, he rushes to death that he may become the patron of the true and the hope of the world! It is too absurd. He who claimed to have come from God, to be the image of God, and to have sustained in the opinion of the author of the "Origins of Christianity," that character with dignity, was surely not the one to pretend miracles.

Yet the claim to work miracles is every where made by him. This is not to be forgotten. Deny the miracles still they were supposed to be wrought by him or you cannot have a starting point for the myth. They could not be supposed to be wrought without an attempt to work them. If he attempted them and they were not real, he either deceived himself or he deceived others. The latter is impossible. The nature of man does not admit of such antitheses. That the most noble being of all the ages—thus according to recent sceptic opinion—should be a deceiver, no honest man can candidly affirm. Did he deceive himself? This would seem a weakness incompatible with his great strength. Then if the miracles were not wrought they could neither have been attempted nor pretended. But where then is there any foundation for the accounts? There is none. Had there been no attempt there had been no history of the success of the attempt. Had there not been many attempts there had been no such numerous and detailed accounts as we have. The utmost fertility of imagination could produce no fruit without seed. Some of this must have been sown. It must have been scattered broadcast to produce such an abundant harvest in so short a time. Without doubt then Jesus attempt-

ed the cure of many diseases, but did he only attempt them? Is imagination or faith—if you will—to be accredited with their success? Was there no reality in the hundreds of cures which the grave evangelists set down to the account of Jesus? Be it so. But what becomes of the noble character of Jesus? Self deceived was he? We cannot admit it. Did he deceive others? With his character that is impossible.

But it may be said there were no doubt cures of such diseases as may be acted on by an exceedingly powerful nature working beneficially, medicinally upon weak diseased ones. What then! Why then it is only the amount of the curative virtue that is objected to by scepticism. Grant that any disease was really cured by the power of his great presence, *by the virtue which went out of him*, why not admit that some disease more difficult of cure in our estimation might be operated on by the same presence and nature—and more difficult ones still tell you come to the most difficult of all—the arrest of death—the resuscitation of the corpse. The least is in some degree miraculous, which having admitted you cannot say unless you know the *amount* of curative virtue in the cause, how great must be the power of that disease which its agent cannot conquer.

But this does not touch those miracles in which material nature bent like a worshipper to his wishes. Did he attempt any of them? The same line of argument would shew that the attempt was made, or the story could not have had its necessary germ. But why should there be difficulty in admitting them. Is it impossible that spiritual will can operate on matter save through material media and contact? Then creation was impossible. God is a spirit yet he wheels the worlds. Grant this claim that Christ came from God, where is the difficulty about the delegation of such power. Why should he who guides the planets not be able to grant power to another to control the sea. Tell us the *scientific reason* against this rational position. Many of the most sceptical believe in the mesmeric will as a mechanical agent.

There is certainly no absurdity in such suppositions although science has not discovered any medium through which the action can take place—nor is there any proper reason why the Creator, who is the origin of all the forces of the universe both spiritual and physical, should not, to his own Son grant a potency which He constantly exercises. If we have the proof that Jesus is the Son of God, and that, he, attempted such works it is certain they were done. The moral certainty neutralizes the natural improbability. To be assured that Christ wrought these miracles it is only necessary to know that he was *wise good and true*.

We approach another point—the Incarnation. We may observe he never affirmed this explicitly of himself. But is it not the only legitimate explanation of his life? It has been said that the account of his origin must have been derived from the mother of Jesus. Well but this account can be judged of by its verisimilitude with the other facts. The truth of the mother's account is corroborated by the son's character. Had not the life of Jesus already necessitated the incarnation as a logical postulate prior to a word on the subject from Mary? Such seems to have been John's judgement. "We beheld his glory the glory, as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth." Why has none like him appeared on earth? Does not the reply sound natural—because none had a similar origin. After Alexander came Hannibal, Cæsar and Napoleon, and with Socrates are associated Pluto and Aristotle; but Jesus sits on his own unapproachable throne. We speak of orders of warriors, poets, philosophers, prophets, but there is only one Christ. It is no disparagement of Socrates, to say that he might have sat at the feet of Paul and listened to his wonderful discourses, with rapture, yet Paul afar off worships Christ. If Plato had heard John he would have given up his charming dialectics to wonder at the discourses inspired by the word that was made flesh. The influence of Jesus upon the disciples, and upon the world, is the standing miracle of history. Did all

this influence flow from a man like ourselves? Yes like yet how unlike—like sinners yet *holy*. And whence the holiness? Is it the foul well of humanity that has ever kept pouring out muddy, dirty, slimy, fetid waters before and since, which for one short hour sent out such a sweet stream, that the centuries as it flowed down have rejoiced to drink of it? Strange inexplicable life if God be not his special Father. Ah, it is the incarnation alone which explains how this sweet life flows from the bitter fount of humanity. Tell me not of the impossibility of the incarnation. Jesus had been impossible without it. The incarnation is the only correct solution of the PROBLEM CHRIST.

Whether in an enquiry of this kind we should start with the assumption of the incarnation or arrive at it as our goal, is a question for each enquirer. Neander, the author of "Ecce Deus," and others, take the former course. The author of "Ecce Homo" having commenced with the mere man life, has ascended to something approaching a Divine origin. "It pleased the Father to beget no second son like him," is an expression pointing this way. The course pursued by Strauss and Renan, and others, assuming the miracle as impossible, is utterly unscientific. It seems fairer to assume nothing, to interrogate the facts, letting them develope conclusions, rather than assuming conclusions to make the facts accord with them. The last mode was that of necessity pursued by the disciples. Having seen the works, accompanied with the man, heard his words, considered his claims, they were at last in a position to answer the question, "Whom do you say that I am?" and intelligently to affirm, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." It may be, however, thought that this is an experience which cannot be repeated. They have announced a conclusion which it is for us to verify. The discoverer of a law in nature stands in a different relation to it from any one who may come after him. It is allowable for the follower to interrogate all the facts which have led to the discovery, but from the beginning he will have reference to the

conclusion of his predecessor—not, however, as having adopted it implicitly, but as a theory by which the facts may be explained. I believe that starting with the incarnation as a doctrine, we shall find all the facts take their proper place under it; and also that from the mere consideration of the facts, we shall ultimately arrive at the deity of Christ as the necessary law from which such a life must flow. We express our conviction that the indisputable character of Christ will necessitate the affirmation of the miracle and of the incarnation. This method of testing the character with a view to the discovery of the nature from which it springs, has great advantage with the sceptic. The character of Christ puzzles him, confounds him. It is a Sphinx which eats up all the daughters of his thoughts. No Edipus will ever solve for him the riddle. I have seen no explanation of the confessedly lofty, glorious, pure character of Jesus from the pen of Rationalism, which is not self-destructive,—affirming what it denies, denying what it affirms,—allowing so much to Christ that it must allow all—a perfect manhood, sinlessness, sovereignty, God—nature. He is a miracle, and why should He not begin in miracle, evolve miracle, triumph over the grave, trample on death, and ascend to God as His natural father, and to heaven as His native home?

The argument against the miracles of Christ often presents itself in the following form. Miracles have been pretended in all ages. We have apparently well attested accounts of some of them. What can be said to those of Port Royal &c. Where shall we stop? Admit those of Christ and it is argued we have no barrier against a perfect inundation of the miraculous, sweeping away the deductions of reason and the facts of observation in a general deluge—not even leaving us a Newton in his Principia, like another Noah to float over submerged science. Such is the form which the reasoning assumes. But is this reasoning reasonable? Having a good claim to an estate should I be debarred from an action at law for its recovery, on the ground that other unfounded claims to

that or other estates will be encouraged by my deed? Absurd! Because I believe that those flashing brilliants in the crown of the queen of the greatest empire are diamonds of incalculable worth, I am not necessitated to admit, that the tiara of a stage heroine, who assumes for the night the sovereign character, is set with gems of like worth, although their sheen may be as dazzling. We come to probable conclusions about paste and pearl, about coloured glass and rubies, about tinsel and gold, from a knowledge of the position and character of their wearers. In the moral world we make like deductions. We want to know who this priest, prophet, prince *is*, before we accredit him with the diamonds of heaven and the signet of God. If indeed we could bring them to the trial—make a personal eye witness examination, it would not be necessary to say, or think much of the quality of the possessors. But this we, who live long after the shining acts, have been hid in the night of the ages, only as it were gleaming fitfully on us from the past, cannot do. To an extent we still can do this with telescopic thought—we can still bring them near, and view their wondrous majesty. But when dealing with those who deny the evidence, who talk of the improbability of God's granting those jewels of his crown to be worn by any one—we may shew that what were otherwise improbable becomes only a natural assumption when we find that it is from the head and bosom of His own Son, that they flash their light over the naturalism of the world. Is He, the sinless one, the only perfect man, the only begotten of the Father, whose claims to Godhead have been accepted by the highest thinkers and the best of men—from Thomas the leader of sceptics, and Paul the converted persecutor, down to all who accept his religion in its vital power,—as their Lord and God.—I say, is he to stand in the world without any other ornature save that of His own transcendent character? Well, He might have done so; but assuredly when we have accepted the miracle of his being and character, we can feel but little hesitation in accepting the belief that God also by His own supernatural Son should

perform supernatural works—not more in attestation of his mission as God's ambassador and revealer, than as the proper and fitting setting of the crown of moral glory with which his own proper Godsonship had already encircled his head. We believe him, first for his words, which reveal to us his character; and we believe his works as the secondary evidence of that great doctrine which we have already received,—that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Christ, then, when truly seen, known with the feeling and heart, becomes to the Christian his own evidence. I say *seen*—rather than affirmed as the result of any logical process. Indeed they who trust alone to a verbal and constricted logic will never know Christ, or only at a great distance. Logic and reason are greatly lauded by the sceptical school—and justly too;—but some other fine faculties of our nature are too much despised in weighing religious questions. Perhaps the sceptic will smile when we quote Paul, that “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” What have the heart and feeling to do with evidence? it has been said. Ah, it is a miserably dry barren logic that tries to deal with moral questions without them! It is like the tap-root of the tree proposing to do without the million fibres which search after all nourishments bringing them up for the use of the root, which is thus but as the channel through which the juices pass, to the elaboration of bud and leaf—flower and fruit. Upon the state of the fibre as much as on that of the root is the health of the tree dependent; and upon the state of the feeling, as much as on that of the reason, are true judgments and healthy conclusions in the moral world founded. A man of dull feeling, hard heart, and depraved moral sentiments, will as much miss a true apprehension of the character of Jesus Christ, as though reason were unseated and lunacy were ascendant. Indeed, our perception of Christ's character is dependent on our whole being—on our capacity as reasoners, and on our character as men. What is Jesus to each man but his ideas of Jesus? What is any man to us

but our ideas of him? The Jesus of the Gospels is one, but the Jesus of each person is many. There will be a general similitude in the images within the souls of his many worshippers, but each man will give him a subjective colouring from the character of his own reason and heart. There are, no doubt, great specific types of opinion regarding him, differing widely, not merely as the leaves of the same tree differ, but as the bramble from the pine. There is the low humanitarian view, like ivy creeping along the earth, taking hold of Christ as though he were some ancient tower to be adorned with the graceful foliage of sentiment and compliment, but as belonging essentially to the decaying past. Then there is the view of the Arian, clinging with its tendrils to his superhumanity, and drawing its nourishment from the Divine unigenitus; and there is the still higher Trinitarian view, which beside all that, lays hold on Him with its hopes and worship as very God of very God, although within the limits of the human. In these great types of belief there is vast variety, correspondent with the clearness of the perceptions of those who hold them, setting at defiance the definitions of Athanasius. But as there is a true type of the tree or of man, to which each individual more or less conforms, and yet is not absolutely alike, so there is the true type or idea of Christ, to which all men's souls which are made strong in reason, and pure in heart, tend to conform,—that is to say, who are *regenerate*, for what is regeneracy in its effects but the restoration of our whole being to strength of reason, to purity of nature, to holiness of purpose and life—the spirit of God having used the truth for this very end, that the *Man of God might be made perfect*. Of course sanctification implies that the capacity for truth and for righteousness requires still further to be enlarged and filled up, leaving room for differences of opinion of Christ. Nor should there be any attempt to force men to the adoption of opinions which may have closer conformity to the objective truth than those to which they have already attained. By our confessions and our catechisms, and our teach-

ings, we ought to present the various Christian doctrines as near as possible to the truth, as seen through the translucent mind and pure heart; but remembering, that the only true teacher is Jesus himself,—and that it is by seeing Jesus that the soul is made fitter to see him better; that it is by the Gospel history that the spirit works in purifying the soul, so that at last the transfigured Son of God stands before the illuminated mind of his disciples. It is only by companying with Him, by hearing His words, by considering His sweet innocence, His dove-like purity, His unwearied labour, His self-renunciation, His meekness under suffering,—that, with Peter, we are at last led to exclaim—“Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.”

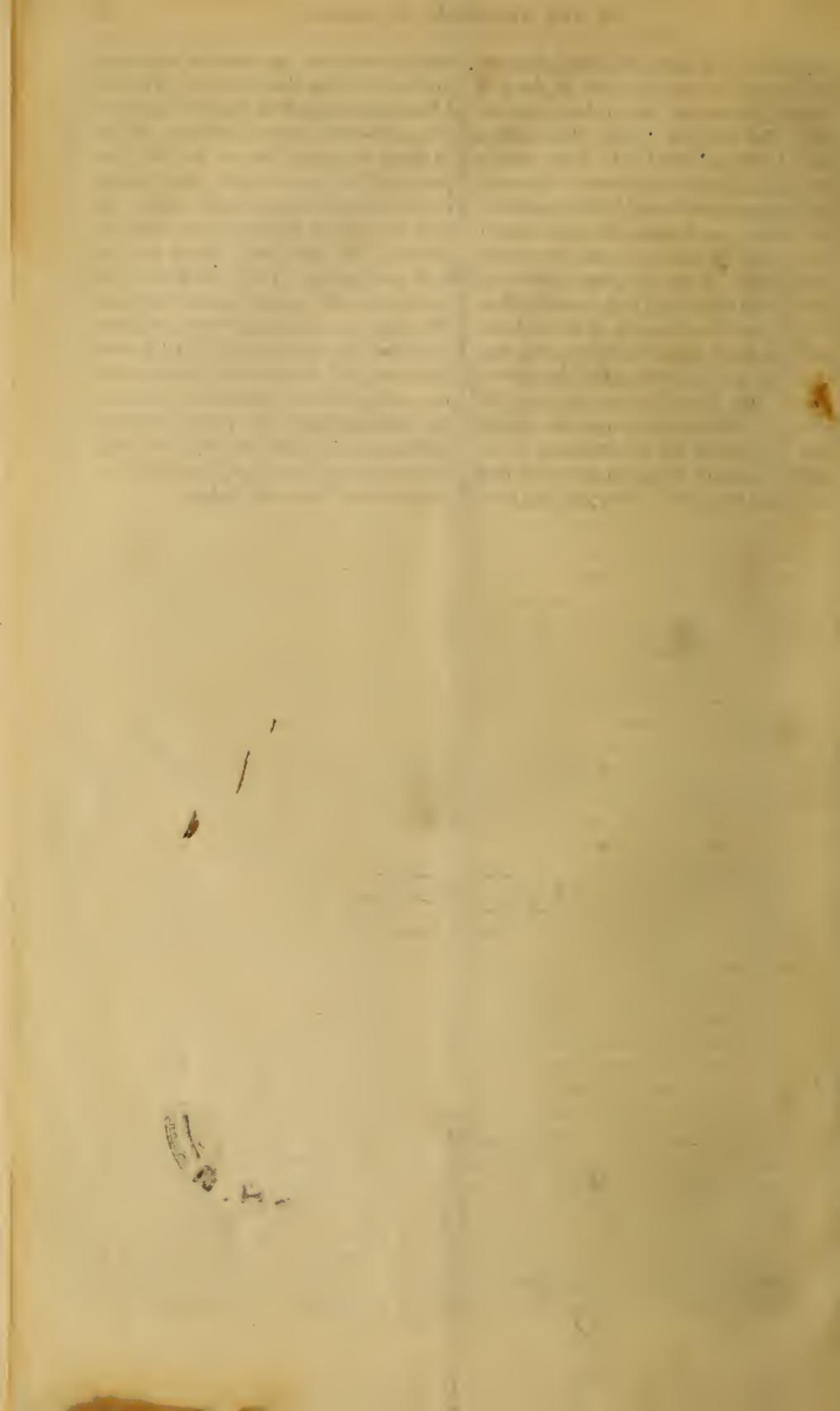
We have thus, starting from the basis which scepticism itself allows, arrived, by, as we believe, a fair enquiry, at an intelligent affirmation of the supernatural character, Divine nature, and marvellous works of Christ. Perhaps some of you may think that I might have better employed my time than in rehearsing and discussing objections against our faith, with which the great body of the Christian people are not troubled. Probably, however, such a view will be found to underrate the advances which scepticism is making among the ranks of, especially, the educated classes. In the workshops of our cities among our artizans, the theories I have brought before you are subjects of common conversation. Scientific men ignore Christianity. A portion of the periodic press makes its daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly attacks upon it. Scepticism is in the murky air of our cities; our steamboats carry it on the seas and rivers; our locomotives through our towns and villages, and the rural homestead often feels the infection of doubt, and denial of whatever is sacred. It is of importance that those who have been set apart to defend the faith should be especially conversant with the attacks which have been and now are being made upon it. The ostrich hiding its head from the pursuer, is no proper example to follow. Ignorance is a shield through which the shafts of the enemy reach the heart. Knowledge is a

better buckler. He that would gain the battle, must be able from a commanding height to survey the whole field. It is as necessary we should know what and where the enemy's forces are, as the position and powers at our disposal. To contemn the enemy is often to lose the field. On the other hand, ignorance often so magnifies the foe as to induce retreat and bring disaster. He possesses poor courage who is afraid to look both truth and error in the eye. We need to know what Christ's enemies say of him, with their own lips, and to deal fairly with their own words. To misrepresent them is bad policy and worse morals.—Christ listened to Satan and answcrcd him. He was not afraid to stand before the judgment seat to be judged fairly; nor is he now afraid. All he wants is that his disciples should not forsake him and flee, but stand by him, and with the words of truth defend him. He cannot speak now, but by us. Let him not be crucified among us, as he often has been since Pilate gave sentence against him. We may shrink and cower like the disciples, while Jesus again bears his cross, and because we hide our heads in ignorance, think that all goes well with him and with his cause. We may be debating who shall be greatest in the kingdom, like the Jews when the battering rams of Titus were shaking the solid walls of Jerusalem. Let the people be at rest, but it is not good that those to whom the leadership of Christ's armies is entrusted should sleep through the whole night, while attacks are made. We ought also to make such enquiries for our own sakes. It may be more comfortable to be at ease, free from the cares which enquiry and discussion impose, as well as from the doubts they may originate; but it is not good for an intellectual soul, were no general issues at stake. “Never are the truths of salvation properly received by us without the free exercise of our own mental powers.” The reception of dogmas from authority never produces right faith. Even the faith which has sprung up in the soul from the evidence of Jesus in his own Gospel, will bear all the more and better fruit from the stirring of the soil at the

proper time. It seems as though it might kill the tree to bare its roots to the cold nipping frosts—yet true culture requires this. Has not the Divine Husbandman said, I will dig about it? What has He been doing by those processes of thought which the sceptical school have necessitated, but baring, as it were, the very roots of faith in all Christian souls, that they might grow better. I can say from experience, that I feel more truly and certainly christian, from re-investigation of the evidences in the light of recent objections, but especially the great evidence—the character of Jesus. But, indeed, are we not doing this always? Whenever we open the Gospels in a right spirit we are conscious of the pure presence of Him who proceeded forth and came from God. But, you say, every

sceptical book and argument is a as dark shadow obscuring that character. Yes, but I have observed that the Sun of Righteousness turns these clouds to heavenly glories. In them we may, if we are in His company, see Him transfigured. Jesus has so shone, even upon many sceptic minds, that they have raised for Him a tabernacle for worship. We have gone beyond them in their conclusions. They will rise to our conceptions, we cannot descend to theirs. We have placed on the mount of transfiguration the temple to which all nations shall flow, and the eyes of all the ages shall turn—where Jesus sits, in its holy of holies, the sinless, the holy, the perfect—the Son of Man and the Son of God, the only-begotten—very God of very God, Saviour, Propitiation, Ruler and Judge.





MAR. 13/31

